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ABSTRACT

Founded in 1854 as the Ashmun Institute, Lincoln University in southern Pennsylvania is the nation's oldest historically black university. Classical rhetoric and canonical literature were taught at Lincoln since its founding. Lincoln's writing program emerged fully and autonomously in 1978 and grew roughly at the same time that the discipline of "Composition" was itself becoming autonomous, and although concurrent, Lincoln's program emerged from a discourse instigated a decade before by external political events. This discourse was the 1960s civil rights struggle. This paper focuses on the events between 1969 and 1974 when the Lincoln University community became acutely aware of specific external politics, and recounts what happened on campus. The paper explains that the violent police brutality directed at African Americans in Augusta, Georgia, caused the Lincoln faculty and student body to open up a new kind of dialogue, one concerned with both internal administrative politics and larger national issues. In 1971, it states, a new writing intensive course called Freshman Humanities was launched in the wake of discussions about student writing (in)abilities. The two political threads at Lincoln, a conservative scrutiny of problematic grammar under the warning cries of "reparation standards" and the progressive alliance (faculty and students), were never mutually exclusive. The paper notes that from 1969 to 1974 a concurrent repressive attitude toward student writing began to emerge at Lincoln and in the country at large. It states that an opening or disrupture in the traditional heritage of faculty/student hierarchy, an opening which reinvigorated the university, allowed for a profound discussion about language use by African American students. (NKA)

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The Progressive Faculty/Student Alliance of 1969/1970 and the Recent History of Lincoln University's Writing Program.

By

Jeffrey L. Hoogeveen

When we scrutinize the history of Lincoln University's Writing Program, we find that its emergence bears little resemblance to the Burkean parlor room contortions chronicled in the larger discipline's history. Founded in 1854 as the Ashmun Institute, Lincoln University, located in southern Pennsylvania, is the nation's oldest Historically-Black University, and is the northernmost HBCU on the East Coast. Classical rhetoric and canonical literature were taught at Lincoln since its founding. Lincoln's Writing Program emerged fully and autonomously in 1978 and grew at roughly the same time that the discipline of Composition was itself becoming autonomous, and although concurrent, Lincoln's Program emerged from a discourse instigated a decade before by external political events. Here, too, we find that the local Program bears resemblance to the larger discipline, which, as Berlin, Harris, and North tell us, was created, at that same period, from the external seeds of social science. However, it was not social science that was the external discourse that launched the Lincoln Writing Program. Instead, it was the Civil-Rights struggle, in the late 1960s, as the struggle was reacting both to increasingly intense violence by civil authorities and to increasingly intense apathy by the larger dominant society, whose involvement was shifting to other discourses, such as feminism, the Vietnam Conflict, RFK's war on poverty, and middle class consciousness-raising. This "escalating," to use a term coined in that time, violence was spurred by Southern (and in some cases, Northern) hatred for and frustrations with the legislative and cultural changes enacted by the struggle. The violence

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was also a reaction by the authorities in the wake of the civil insurrection following the assassination of Reverend Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. The Civil Rights struggle at that time was also facing a new internal pressure: the emergence of the Black Power discourse from the Student Non-Violent Coordinating Committee. Concerns about the future of the Civil Rights struggle and the violence activists faced were shared by the Lincoln University community, which, as a social collective, has a rich tradition of helping in this struggle. By 1969, these shared concerns had formed an institutional solidarity between Lincoln faculty and students. Coincidentally, in 1970 while this alliance was shaping up, another faculty discourse, this one critical of the student/faculty solidarity, found its voice and grew out of the progressive alliance. Both of these strands of discourse, which eventually helped form many of the characteristic elements of the Lincoln Writing Program, are different from the larger Composition disciplinary historiography, which imagines its genesis as internally-self-directed, and built on the agency of a few good people at the right kind of schools.

This paper will focus on the events between 1969 until 1974, the Lincoln University community became acutely aware of specific external politics. The violent police brutality directed at African-Americans in Augusta, Georgia caused the Lincoln faculty and student body to open up a new kind of dialogue, one concerned with both internal administrative politics and larger, national issues. In the early spring semester of 1970, undergraduate Gil Scott-Heron[1] stood at a May Faculty Meeting and "informed the assemblage of his intention to meet shortly with the West Chester County Commissioner's Board, and to read a statement to it and to the press denouncing the atrocities in Augusta, Georgia." Scott-Heron urged the faculty and other students to protest these unjust actions. Scott-Heron was emblematic of a form of activism that

was being ushered into the rural Lincoln community by predominantly urban students experienced and versed in the new realities of the Civil Rights Movement.

During the same Faculty Meeting, Lincoln faculty member and historian Philip Foner, who had been fired from his position in NYC in 1941 during one of the early, often anti-Semitic, Red Witchhunts, helped mediate a week-long student strike of classes. The strike had been called because of Lincoln's institutional inaction during the external Civil Rights events. Scott-Heron's comments were just one part of student/faculty concerns. Both groups were attempting to adjust their own institutional realities with the cultural changes taking place an hour away in Philadelphia to the north and Baltimore, one hour to the south. Interestingly, there was a local angle to the external politics of race. Later in academic year 1969/1970, students and faculty heard rumors that the local Klavern from nearby Cecil County, Maryland was going to attack Lincoln University (and as the FBI investigation into the racist Right's threats against the Lincoln Community this last year indicate, this concern was not baseless paranoia). Both groups joined together and formed a protective perimeter around the campus, lit several bonfires, and as rumor has it, armed themselves to some extent with a few rifles and handguns. The Klan never showed up, but the alliance was strengthened by the defensive actions of the faculty and students.

The student strike of 1969 had been called by a consensus among the Lincoln students with the object of achieving eleven points, which were discussed at the Special Open Meeting of the College Faculty. These points, when adopted, placed students into active roles in University governance, ones which faculty normally served alone in, and the points included the right to partake in administrative hiring and firing decisions. The recollection of faculty members from

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[1]By 1970, Gil Scott-Heron had already formed his first band with Lincoln classmates, which would go on to record the seminal song "The Revolution Will Not Be Televised." Scott-Heron was finishing up his first book of critically-

that time is that the students wanted more power on campus to help affect a larger involvement by the Lincoln community in the national political arena.

The students also wanted, and Foner mediated the successful creation of, a "Student-Faculty Committee at Lincoln University to contact other Black Colleges and all other interested colleges and universities interested in order to explore modes of political activity that would effectively protest the killings in Augusta, Georgia." Collectively, students and faculty discussed options: "The thinking of both students and teachers moved over a wide range: marching, whether on Washington or the United Nations, had outlived its usefulness; the moratorium (which Foner proposed so that students involved in a general classroom walkout strike would not be academically punished) can be most effectively used by studying the present struggle and its future direction; urgent telegrams to the White House are indicated; political analysis is perfectly compatible with a march on Washington, the effects of which can prove beneficial" ("Minutes of the Special Open Meeting"). It may seem implausible that a sudden, contingent, and unexpected change could have happened so quickly; however, archival documentation from before 1969 shows little resemblance regarding faculty/student cooperation compared to what is seen suddenly in 1969 and afterwards. There had been faculty/student projects before, many of them, in fact; however, these projects had been essentially traditional and hierarchical. Within the strata of new knowledge created by the progressive alliance, a language would emerge, from the discourse itself, to rework hierarchical power back into the equation. Certainly, not all of the students and not all of the faculty bought into what had suddenly happened.

The late 1960s and early 1970s were a time of growth and of vigor for Lincoln. Yet for the discipline, one will recall, this was the time of open admissions, when other English Departments were contending with a newer group of students. While many schools may have

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acclaimed poetry, Small Talk at 125th & Lennox, from which the song, "The Revolution..." was taken (Bush).

similarly recognized their students' knowledge when it came to cultural improvement and social change, most practitioners of writing instruction were grappling with the daily reality of writing errors. It is safe to say that few English Writing professionals were dealing with the issue of open admissions to the extent that Mina Shaugnessy was (Maher 141), at the same time; however, errors and under-prepared students were the watchwords of a growing discipline. At this time, the Lincoln English Department had no faculty member with a specialty in Composition, or even Rhetoric.

The strategies for dealing with writing weaknesses had been essentially the same for a long period of time before the late 1960s. A shrill tenor concerning writing instruction emerges suddenly after 1970. Before the 1960s, a sense of paternalism reigned over student writing: benevolent teachers, many white, pointed out good writing and coaxed mainly African-American students into modeling it. Although the paternalism can seem nauseating to this archivist, the tone that emerges, beginning in 1970, is shocking and bracing. Suddenly, student writing is a sign of pathology; its errors are legion and must be corrected. Benevolent paternalism is gone; an angry crusade to erase errors ensues. The new mode of writing pedagogy in 1970 arises from the same discourse that was instigated in 1969.

This collective political activity, however positive, caused some members of the faculty to question the University's academic integrity. In a memo dated September 12, 1971, and addressed to the Department, an English Department faculty member questions what he calls, "Reparations Standards." By this, he means to indicate a two-tiered system of grading that he perceives as allowing African-American students greater academic leeway than that given to the dominant (white) students he has seen at a larger State University, where he taught before

coming to Lincoln. It is important to note, at this point, that the faculty member under discussion is no longer teaching at Lincoln, and, for the record, he is a white, Literature Ph.D.

His memo is meant, he indicates, to instigate a new discussion about what he calls, "the kinds of students we have been seeing for the past few years." Up until this date, the archive shows no indications that "reparations standards" or any other religiously- or racially-conscious grading discussions had been under way. The OED tells us the very term "reparations standards" emerges in 1968 in the Tamarack Review in association with German Holocaust-related reparations to the Jewish people (1559). Lincoln's faculty was a diverse blend of ethnicities and religions. It's really no surprise that a savvy English professor could find the exact canny term to unite and define in such a politically-savvy way both parties in the new solidarity of 1969/1970.

In 1971 a new first semester writing-intensive course, called Freshman Humanities, was launched in the wake of the recent discussions about student writing (in)abilities. It was also referred to as "Language and Literature." This course replaced the long-lived Great Books freshman writing course. Humanities 102 was taught by any member of the Humanities Division (Art, Foreign Languages, Music, Philosophy, Religion, and English). The Literature Ph.D. wrote several memos problematizing "this new interdisciplinary course." In the late Fall of 1970, in the next academic year, the Literature Ph.D., who earlier raised the issue of reparations standards, raised issues about Language and Literature that probed at the unspoken rationale for creating the concept of "interdisciplinary." He was concerned with the Composition pedagogy skills other faculty members might (and might not) have, especially in the "crisis" of "reparations" grading. Faculty Meeting Minutes from that time state that the rationale for the "interdisciplinary" course was "to create an excitement among our students and for those faculty teaching the course that matches the tenor of our time." Apparently insufficient discussion about

what was meant by "Inter"- disciplinary had preceded the adoption of the course. At that time, the faculty member thought that writing should be taught by English professionals. His memo did not stop the adoption of the course.

A memo, written two months later, by the same correspondent, argues for the return of the teaching of the course, and any other writing-based interdisciplinary Humanities course, to the English Department. "This course, Language and Literature, should be under the exclusive jurisdiction of the English Department, and it would be taught exclusively by English Department faculty members who LIKE BEING ENGLISH TEACHERS AND WHO LIKE TEACHING COMPOSITION AND LITERATURE. (General noise signifying student approbation at this point)" (Upper case and parentheses in original). This jurisdiction, even with his assumption of student agreement, was not awarded to the English Department. The Literature Ph.D. was never able to galvanize a mood for changing the discourse of writing instruction in the Department, or in the Language and Literature course. But, through his incessant problematization of any and all aspects of writing instruction, he was able to incrementally alter the use of the language of the political alliance of 1969/1970 in order to open new threads of discourse, ones concerned with restoring a hierarchical, paternal surveillance over student writing.

In a December 15, 1972 statement to the Humanities Division faculty, the same author began another attack on the course by questioning the system of allocation for the teaching assignments. The system doled out the teaching slots for the interdisciplinary course using what was, as he writes, "denominated the `lottery, or Beans-in-a-Pot Plan'." The problem with the lottery system, the memo writer makes clear, is one of fairness, not of disciplinary priorities (i.e.,

English faculty teach writing more effectively than Fine Arts faculty members). His complaints were to no avail.

At Lincoln, the dispersal of writing, reading, and other literacy skills out of the English Department was being argued against. This is not the case with the larger discipline, which at the same time was disavowing its efficacy in the face of a new literacy crisis. Stephen North quotes Carl Klaus from his 1976 article, "Public Opinion and Professional Belief": "In other words, Klaus concludes, to be saved from `the appalling state of our ignorance' (p.338), and to prevent writing teachers from being treated `like second-class citizens, like dedicated amateurs, which we are, rather than genuine professionals, which we are not' (p.340), Practitioners must steep themselves in knowledge and methods that are not their own" (North 328). We find that the discipline at large historicizes itself in a way opposite to what was being done in one smaller institution, where literacy skills had become associated with local careerist and external, national contexts. However, as our historians make clear, Composition, as it was practiced in the elite schools, had little to no external context and therefore required an almost absurd self-renunciation of professional efficacy, especially when those skills were most needed.

The progressive politics of student/faculty solidarity was still very much in the air even in 1974. During the May 1974 Commencement, Paul Robeson was awarded an honorary doctorate of law degree. [2] The honorary doctorate bestowed on Robeson was the culmination of the progressive political alliance of 1969.

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[2] Robeson was no stranger to Lincoln. His father was an alumnus. Before his career in acting took off, Robeson had been a sports coach at Lincoln, where he had also been inducted into the Alpha Phi Alpha Fraternity. The Lincoln chapter of Alpha Phi Alpha established a Paul Robeson Scholarship Fund in 1973; the national organization established a Paul Robeson Humanitarian Award in December 1975 (Bay Area Paul Robeson Centennial Committee, Inc). Robeson was still quite a controversial figure during the 1960s and 1970s. His "leftist" politics had made him a persona non grata for many institutions, but not Lincoln. There was his marriage to a Soviet citizen (his great niece is currently a professor of Russian at Lincoln). Then there were his awards throughout what was then called the second world (there is a school named after him in what was then East Germany). Finally, there was his

During the years between 1969 and 1974, a concurrent, repressive attitude toward student writing began to emerge at both Lincoln, using the discourse of the progressive alliance, and in the country at large. Susan Miller writes, "Obviously, a (new) `literary crisis' occurred in the 1970s" (142). Miller correctly discerns that "composition was established long ago to be a low site where certain students, corrective teaching, and inevitable anxieties from nineteenth-century claims for vernacular textual research could be displaced" (143). She links her historical project too tightly to the official historiography, when she writes, "the novelty of composition has no obvious sources in larger political changes in the 1960s and 1970s" (142). Miller is correct when she categorizes process as a "return of the repressed" (143), in relation to grammatical correctness and older forms of writing instruction. However, Miller's macro-analysis misses the political movements on smaller campuses (and like many other histories, overlooks the HBCUs altogether), when she writes, "current composition has more to do with movements within its originating traditions" (142-3). The two political threads at Lincoln, a conservative scrutiny of problematic grammar under the warning cries of "reparation standards" and the Lincoln progressive alliance, were never mutually-exclusive: they were always linked together at their originary utterances made during the academic year 1969/1970. These utterances were obviously linked to external events, and these utterances eventually birthed the Writing Program at Lincoln, which grew out of dissatisfaction with the interdisciplinary course.

The opening or disrupture in the traditional heritage of faculty/student hierarchy, an opening which reinvigorated the total university, allowed for a profound discussion about language use by African-American students. Although the archive is silent on this matter, this specific concern with student language might have been connected to a larger examination by all

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work toward world peace (and in this he was joined by another man with Lincoln connections, Albert Einstein, whom had been awarded an honorary doctorate by Lincoln).

parties of the new language in the post-Dr. King era Civil Rights movement. Concerning students, though, the paternalism of the faculty hierarchy had shifted invisibly into a hyper-paternalistic concern with absolute correctness in standard written English. Faculty members engaged in one public discussion about how difficult it would be for African-American students to challenge racism without "mastering," a term that shows up again and again, standard English, so as to be on equal footing, language-wise, with the white race. Throughout the 1970s and into the early 1980s, within English, the solidarity movement of 1969/1970 becomes attenuated by various Composition concepts: "standards," "abilities," "standard English," and finally, "grade inflation." Each concept attenuates the discourse further. In 1978, the Writing Program is launched and a new bureaucratic discourse emerges to deal systematically with these concepts.

Rather than examining the journals, an analysis of local conditions at a variety of post-secondary schools might help to establish the many competing truths of our discipline's genesis. The monolithic, journal- and conference-based, great texts/anxiety of influence historiography, of course, was never a factor for Lincoln's Writing Program (and probably many other schools that do not figure into the official historical reckoning), where the contingencies of attenuated discourses growing out of internal careerist and external Civil Rights events had to be dealt with.

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